Clark's Pathology: Painful Renovation of the Species

Clark's approach to the Asylum and to pathology agree, and they are strikingly different from Workman's.[lxi] Clark wrote and published a text-book on mental disorders in which disorders treated epically by Workman are approached more clinically under the rubric of worry. Worry, combined with heredity, becomes Clark's "master trope," much as masturbation had been Workman's. Worry includes masturbation, as Clark's emphasis shifts from masturbation to the hereditary "mechanism" that enables it be at once cause and effect of degeneration. Masturbation is "a great strain on the nerve centres, which are roused to undue activity by artificial means"; subsequently, "if the father is not capable of producing a vigorous spermatozoa the result means a degenerate progeny" (150). Worry is listed among the four principal causes of paresis (81) and accounts for a number of other disorders, from neurasthenia to dypsomania, in an age Clark characterizes as "nerve-exhausting" (254), with "daily brain work above normal; the worry of competitive business; the humdrum of all work and no relaxation; the fierce battle for life all along the line; the envies and jealousies in the world of fuss and fashion, etc." (268).[lxii]

Consistent with this hereditarianism, Clark believes in the gradual upward tendency of humanity, slowly erected on the equivocal and painfully accumulated achievements of past struggles. At the same time, this gradual improvement is governed by truth to an original. That improvement has always been so is indicated by our similarity to ancient Egyptian mummies; that it must always be so is indicated by analogy to the modern steam engine:

> The engine may be well constructed, and able to generate much steam, but if the safety-valve is dangerously poised, the governor improperly hung, and the balance wheel out of proportion, the strength of the engine is greatly wasted and impeded. (1879, 303)

A capacity for fulfilling an original potential is regulated or rather opposed and cancelled out by an inert force so nearly its equal that nature's potential can only be realized very gradually over time. Progress is just the slowly accumulated